

THE IMPACT OF ST. OLAF ON THE EARLY CHURCH OF NORWAY

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Roger B. Knutsen

Brooklyn, N.Y.



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PREFACE

This paper is primarily based upon Norwegian authorities to which references are provided. Most of these documents have no author. They are, however, a part of a rich literary tradition. I have personally translated these. There is also an extensive bibliography of modern works available in English. These are found in the bibliography.

Since this paper is in English there are some departures from Norwegian practice in the spelling and use of proper names.

I..INTRODUCTION

1. Land

Norway strikes the most casual visitor as a land where nature still reigns supreme. This fact, which is the secret of its attraction for the tourist, is also the secret of its history.

At most periods of history even that sparsely settled population has had a harder struggle for existence than at any rate the Americans - a poorer diet, inferior housing, fewer reserves to meet a period of drought or deluge. This is at least true of the two periods we know best, that in which the Vikings explored and exploited and our own century, which has seen Norway transformed by the earnings of a huge merchant fleet and the development of hydro-electric power and new oil resources in the North Sea.

In the west and the north there are plenty of hill-side farms and clusters of fishermen's cottages, still in use, where it takes the whole of a man's courage, ingenuity, and waking hours to win a livelihood from Norway's natural resources.

Norway is a land of ancient mountains, shaped and scraped during the ice ages, when some of the soil in which it is now so sadly deficient was carried as far away

as England. The summits are much lower than the Alps, but the whole country is virtually a single high plateau, seamed by deep valleys, whose bottoms, when drained in seawater, constitute the famous fjords. Nearly four-fifths of the whole lies above the 500-foot contour line; on an average, Norway lies nearly twice as high as the rest of Europe. It is also the farthest outpost of Europe, and indeed of the civilized world, towards the north. One-third of the west coast is north of the Arctic Circle, and although this, the tourist's Land of the Midnight Sun, plays a relatively small part in the Norwegian economy, it is an important fact that even the southernmost point in Norway is well north of the "Tree Line", beyond which cultivation has always been found difficult and unrewarding.

But what the land withholds is partly compensated by the sea. Ever since the first human beings established their homes along the Norwegian coast, the harvest of the sea has made up for many deficiencies in the harvest of the land. But even more important is the influence of the sea upon the climate, for apart from this much of the country could never have been inhabited at all. Along the west coast the genial influence of the Gulf Stream warms the entire coastal region. The fjords are not frost-bound in winter, even in the vicinity of the North Cape which is the northernmost island.

2. People

It is perhaps ten thousand years since the first men entered Norway. There is some reason to think that, unlike most later migrants, they came from the northeast, into Finmark, and their arrival may have occurred before the end of the last Ice-age. As land and sea became more productive, the easy passage up the fjords attracted an increasing population of fishers and hunters and harvesters of wild berries, who lived on all the produce which bountiful nature placed within their reach. They kept close to the coastline, where piles of refuse-fifty kinds of animal bones have been counted on one spot-show their tastes, and impressionistic drawings of animals their artistic skill and, probably, the magic which was supposed to help the chase. Flint for axeheads being scarce in Norway, these early inhabitants made great use of implements of carefully fashioned bone. But gradually we may trace the influx into Norway of better techniques for working stone, and while the huge battle axes were brought in by a tribe of new comers from east-central Europe, the native produce is shown by experiment to have been capable of cutting trees.

Toward the end of the period when only stone was used-perhaps about 2,000 years before the birth of Christ-the tribes entering Norway could have been identified as

speakers of a distinctive Nordic language, the branch of the Teutonic language group from which modern Swedish, Danish and Norwegian are all derived. It would be wrong, however, to picture this as a single precise event. Some tribes came into the country well after the beginning of the Christian era. It would be still more wrong to picture it as the coming into the land which has been their unchallenged possession ever since of a single, well-defined racial type. The Nordic stock was probably already a mixed one before it began to make its way into Norway from the south (across Denmark and Sweden), from the east (into Trondelag), and by the natural passage up the west coast. It is a striking fact that the very tall, very fair, blue-eyed Norwegian of today was already the predominant type on the other side of the North Sea at a time when the Celts were tentatively establishing the first and least important of the four main layers in the British population.

3. Pre-Viking era

The last centuries before Christ were for Norway a period of regression. The rise of classical civilization, it is true, brought the country for the first time within the orbit of written records, when Pytheas of Marseilles about the year 300 B.C. made his way across via the Scottish

islands to 'Thule' and the midnight sun. A deterioration of the climate checked the hopeful progress in agriculture, as it became necessary to keep the flocks under cover in winter and the long~~ely~~ing snow restricted farming.

But from the second century of the Christian era Norway began slowly to develop the formidable strength which she revealed to the world in the age of the Vikings. The Roman influence was partly cultural. The imitation of imports led to the creation of beautiful native work in pottery and metals. The runic alphabet was received, probably from some Germanic people closely affected by Rome; but Norwegians, as they laboriously cut the first magic inscriptions in runes, no doubt felt that they were invoking a power of which Rome had long possessed the secret. But Rome's greatest gift lay in the fact that the iron tools and weapons from Roman and Romanized sources encouraged the Norwegians to advance from the making-up of imported raw iron to the exploitation of the bog iron which could be had for the digging in the many of the inland valleys.

There is some evidence that small kingdoms with councils and sanctuaries existed in the districts of early settlement just north of Oslo soon after the beginning of the Christian era.

There was an ancient close relationship between heathen rites and political unity that may help explain the obduracy

with which the Tronders were later to resist the introduction of Christianity. But it was from Vestfold on the west side of the Oslo-fjord that a line of kings exiled from Sweden set out to schieve the unity of Norway.

II. The Viking Age

The record of the Viking raids on England, which fills many pages of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, opens with a reference to men from three ships of the Horder, who landed at Portland in Dorset and killed a royal prince. This was in the reign of Beorchtric, king of Wessex from 786-802. Then came the first of the attacks upon the Celtic monasteries, located in pious seclusion on islands of the North and Irish Seas. Discovered perhaps by accident, they were prey to whet the barbarian appetite. Thus Lindisfarne, the holy island of St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert, and Iona, the home of St. Columba and burial place of Christian kings, were sacked in 793 and 802, not without stabbings and drowning of monks and nuns. On June 8, writes the Chronicle, 'Heathen men cruelly destroyed God's Church on Lindisfarne with plunder and manslaughter'; a grave-stone is still to be seen on the island which displays on one side the Cross, the Hand of God, and two monks kneeling at their prayer, and on the other side the Northmen swinging their great war-axes for the attack.

But, in any attempt to trace the activities of the Norwegian Vikings or sea-rovers, it is important to bear in mind that their voyages, which most commonly followed a course somewhat north of the latitude of the Scottish mainland were part of a movement in which the Danes also went out, chiefly by the southern part of the North Sea and the English Channel, and the Swedes traced a river route from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Caspian. This fact partly explains their overwhelming success, since Christendom was exposed to simultaneous attack from so many quarters.

Norway at the dawn of the Viking Age lay far behind Anglo-Saxon England in some important aspects of civilized life. It was untouched as yet by the Christian religion. At the major sanctuaries great feasts of horse flesh, accompanied sometimes by human sacrifices, were held on fixed dates in the fall, at mid-winter, and on April 14- at the outset of the campaign season. But the worship of such gods as Odin and Thor the thunderer were increasingly enriched by the stories forming the Asa mythology. It was a country completely lacking in town life, where trade was conducted at seasonal markets which sprang to life during the sailing months or when snow and ice made transport possible down through the mountains. Norway was too slow, too, in its approach toward political unification, having perhaps as many as thirty states.

It was their skill with the axe and familiarity with timberworking which had enabled the Norwegians by about AD 600 to set a deep keel and an efficient side-rudder in a clinker-built craft of oak, as much as 50 feet in length and about 9 feet wide amidships. There they hoisted the square striped sail of which all Europe was soon to live in dread, and stood prepared to test the practical qualities of their ships by the first voluntary open-sea voyages ever undertaken, so far as we know, by western races.

One type of Viking expedition therefore seem easily explicable in terms, not of necessity but of greed. At a later stage, when plunder would be becoming harder, the weakness of their enemies gave them a further incentive, because it proved feasible to exact the payments of 'protection money'.

But there were also necessary voyages, which native historians do not hesitate to compare in character and importance with the emigration from their country to the American Middle West a millenium later. The iron axe cut the trees, built the farms, and helped to make a wide variety of wooden structures and implements, ranging from haylofts to split fences, from hand-ploughs to irrigation troughs, on which Norwegian agriculture depended - and still to some extent depends.

Towards the close of the 8th century the development of the land reached a stage at which west Norway had nothing more to offer. Some went eastward over the mountain passes or northwards up the coast, to look for new homes among their own people in districts where there might still be possible farming land to reward the pioneer. Others turned south along the old Frisian trade routes, to compete with Vikings from Denmark. But those who made history were the men who went to the west. They led a movement overseas which eventually reached such dimensions that the least profitable of the old West Norway farms were left deserted.

For several centuries they were the undisputed rulers of the sea. The evidence of sculptured stones, for which the Island of Man is also famous among archaeologists, shows that the religion of the Vikings had a much smaller capacity for survival on new soil. Emblems of the heathen Valhalla are to be seen inscribed upon the Cross, marking the transition to the worship of the 'White Christ', and the heathen mode of burial appears to have fallen into desuetude within two generations of settlement among Christian neighbors.

But in the proud heyday of paganism it was the descent on Ireland - 'the southward trek most renowned' - which had most to offer. The destruction of the Celtic Church

there, which had been the light of western Christendom in the darkest of the Dark Ages, is perhaps the saddest and grimmest part of the whole Viking story. But the soft, low-lying Irish countryside, accessible from the sea, with harbors on which it was easy to base further expeditions for conquest or commerce in lands beyond, appealed also as a place of settlement. After the raids had persisted for a generation the raiders started to winter in Ireland, and about the year 839 Torgils, a chieftain of royal blood, began a systematic conquest. He founded Dublin and took possession of the ecclesiastical capital, Armagh, where he installed himself as abbot. By the time he fell into the hands of the Celtic High King, who duly had him drowned, the whole island was becoming the prey of the 'white strangers' and their rivals, the 'black strangers' or Danes, while mysterious forces of 'foreign Irish' (renegade Christians and persons of mixed race) intervened for or against the High King as booty offered. The newly arrived Danes made a temporary alliance with the Irish against the Norwegians, to which fact we owe the unusually clear distinction between the two Viking peoples in the Irish Chronicles and some objective pictures of their savagery.

After the battle (of Carlingford) messengers from Maelsechlainn, the High King of Ireland, came to the Danes. They found the army encamped on the very battlefield, engaged in cooking their meat. The cauldrons were placed on top of heaps of fallen Norwegians, with spits stuck in among the bodies,

and the fires burning them so
that their bellies burst,
revealing the welter of meat
and pork eaten the night before.
The messengers reproached them
with such conduct, but they
answered that their enemies
would have wished to do the
same to them.¹

The central figure in a confused and brutal struggle was a Norwegian chieftain, who may perhaps be identified as Olaf the White, a descendant of the ancient Kings of Vestfold. He arrived in 853 and established a Norwegian kingdom based on Dublin.

From Ireland the Norwegians also made their way south into the Mediterranean, on joint expeditions with Danish Vikings. The story may be true that they conquered Pisa and Lima, supposing the latter city to be Rome. Certainly they visited the coasts of the Moorish kingdom in the Peninsula as well as its Christian neighbors, with the result that a Moorish embassy to Ireland made the only reconnaissance of a heathen Viking court on record from this period. An easier advance from their Irish bases brought the Norwegians into the Valleys of Seine and Somme and Loire, which resulted in their participation with the Danes in that most momentous of Viking enterprises, the foundation of Normandy. But if I judge, not from an American but from a Norwegian point of view, there remains another work of settlement, begun in this same crowded period, which had a

much closer influence upon Norwegian fortunes. This was the discovery and colonization of Iceland by Norwegians from the homeland and from the existing settlement overseas.

In the 10th century the Viking people were still the great settlers of the western world as well as its chief plunderers and conquerors. In one sense their achievements culminated with Erik the Red, who sailed over unknown seas from Iceland to Greenland and in 984 planted his colony on that inhospitable shore, which remained for many hundred years the last straggling outpost of our civilization. Its barrenness drove them almost at once to feel for and find, the American coast beyond; but the 'Vineland Voyages', which fascinate the modern historian, are really an appendix to the astonishing venture in Greenland.

In the long run, the confusing struggles of this age are chiefly important for what they left behind, namely, a definite Norse strain in the population of Ireland, Scotland and northern England. What this period of close intercourse with the British signified for Norway was a complication of the contest for the throne and, now fortunately, a connection which introduced Christianity as a factor in that contest.

From a mundane as well as spiritual point of view, therefore, Christianity was England's most important gift

to Norway. At this time of history Olaf II claimed the throne as a real Norwegian king. He may have had some contacts with Christianity during his early childhood in East Norway, but his Viking career does not confirm this. Church tradition states that he was both baptized and confirmed at Rouen, where he served the Norman duke.

Certainly it was as a Christian having close relations with the English Church that he set out to claim Norway in two merchant vessels, which carried 120 followers, including some priests, and much Viking gold. At the end of the winter of 1015-1016 a fleet came down from the north to challenge the power which Olaf was evidently building in the south-east, and a single fight at the mouth of the Oslofjord made him king.

The reign of the second Olaf was regarded by the pious traditions of a later age as having been a great era of royal legislation, but in fact legislation was still localized in the county court (ting). What the country needed most, however, was the enforcement of law, and this the great king gave it:

Those who did deeds of rapine oft
tendered red gold to the keen-eyed
king to buy their liberty, but the king
said No. He had their head struck
off with the sword; they received exem-
plary punishment for their plundering.
Such is the way to protect this land.
The great king ruined the families
of robbers and ravagers; he caused
each nimble thief to lose both hand

and foot. Thus peace was restored in the prince's realm. What best showed the power that the guardian of the land possessed was that he had full many a Viking put away with sharp weapon.²

In such circumstances the priests whom Olaf had brought with him, Englishmen, we may presume, of Norse or Danish ancestry, found a readier hearing and obtained an authority which the earlier missionaries had lacked.

The Church of Norway, which was the chief English daughter-church in medieval Europe, dates its establishment from 1024. In that year the king and his ecclesiastical adviser, Bishop Grimkell held a special ting (court) at Møster on the west coast, where Olaf II was supposed to have made his first mass conversions.

Here a code was drawn up, which had then to be submitted for modification and approval at the regional tings. Due provision was made for churches and church officials and the observance of sacraments and holy days. Several penalties were enacted for continuing the worship of the old gods or the closely-related practice of withcraft. But what is most revealing is the attempt to conciliate conservative opinion by keeping up the beer-feasts, which had been held in the temples at the end of each of the three annual solemnities. The beer was now to be blessed, and the first toast were to be drunk 'in honor of Christ and the Blessed Virgin for good years and peace.'

But peace the great king could not secure. Even his work for the church was hampered by the hostility from King Canute in England which made it necessary for Grimkell to receive consecration, not from the mother-church of Canterbury but from the newly-established archbishopric of Bremen. Olaf tried in vain to strengthen his position by an alliance with Sweden and the launching of anticipatory attack on Denmark. But Canute was too strong for him. When he came to claim the over-lordship of Norway' with fifty ships of English thegns' and a powerful Danish fleet, the leading men saw their interest served by siding with a foreign king who controlled the trade routes to the west - and would rule them from a safe distance. For two years Olaf took refuge with his Swedish wife's relations at Kiev. Canute appointed the earl of Lade as his deputy, but when the earl was drowned next winter in the Pentland Firth, his successor in office was a mere boy, Canute's son by his English wife, Aelfgifu of Northampton, who accompanied him to rule in Norway.

They had barely arrived when Olaf emerged from the mountain passes into Trondelag. He led a small group of men from his first home in the Uplands and a few Swedes, collected on his way, and as they came in sight of Norway the king was heard to say that 'many a day he had been happy in that land.' On July 29, 1030, at Stikklestad, he

faced a force twice the size of his own, made up of the local peasantry under their chiefs and some disaffected magnates from the far north.

King Olaf lost the day and his life; but the bruised body was rescued by friends, and was sent secretly to Trondheim. Only twelve months later, bishop Grimkell was able to place it above the high altar of St. Clement's Church as the earthly remains of an acknowledged saint. The greatest cathedral of northern Europe was later built in his honor, on the sandbank in which the body had been hidden. But a greater place was that which the image of Saint Olaf perpetuus rex Norvegiae built for itself in the hearts of the Norwegian people.

III. The Realm of Saint Olaf

Few saints in the middle ages achieved a more suddenly universal renown than the defeated warrior of Stiklestad. Within ten years of his death his name was working miracles in far-off Russia; he was the last western saint accepted by the eastern orthodox church at Constantinople. Six London churches bore the name, and other English churches, dedicated to the saint, were as widespread as Exeter, Chester, and York. Within two generations Trondheim had risen to be a famous city in the eyes of the ecclesiastical historian of the north, who wrote at Breman:

The capital of the Norsemen is Trondemnis,
which is beautified with churches and

visited by a great number of people. There rests the body of the Blessed Olaf, king and martyr, at whose grave God to this day performs great wonders of healing, so that many journey thither from distant lands, hoping to receive help through the merits of the saint.³

How much of this astonishing transformation should be attributed to the spirit of the age; how much to the policy of bishop Grimkell; and how much to the character of the dead king himself, we shall never know.

The English-born queen Aelfgifu and her son made themselves unpopular by treating Stiklestad as a Danish victory, entitling them to rule the Norwegian chieftains and peasants as a conquered people. The consequence was that, within four years of the battle, the very men who had won it for Canute were on their way to bring home Olaf's eleven-year old son from Kiev. Aelfgifu and her son fled to Denmark, leaving Magnus to be accepted as king by all the 'tings'.

The death of Canute himself followed almost immediately, and with the consequent break-up of his empire the Danish threat to Norwegian independence was for a time abated.

Magnus (1034-47) in his later years shared the throne with St. Olaf's half-brother Harald III, who had escaped from the rout at Stiklestad to win fame and fortune in the service of the eastern empire. This illustrious Viking is more familiar to us as Harald Hardrada whom Harold of

England slew at Stamford Bridge in 1066. As he in turn was followed by three generations of direct descendants, the period we are now considering amounts to nearly a century, throughout which the national life was left free to develop without that curse of medieval Norway - a disputed succession to the throne. In this period, which coincides with the transformation of Edward the Confessor's England by the hammer blows of the Norman conquest, Norway figures as a partly self-governing kingdom, increasingly civilized, and a force in the international affairs of the day.

The characteristic institution of the age was the 'ting' (court). It was the right of the individual to summon the 'ting' for his own cause by sending arrows from farm to farm. But by the 11th century its purely local functions had come to matter less than what was done in bigger areas by the great 'lagting', though even their jurisdiction did not cover the entire country. They appointed the king. New laws emanated from the 'tings', or, as in the case of St. Olaf's church law, was adopted with such modifications as each might approve for its own district. Norwegian law therefore long continued to be local rather than common law, based on the intercourse between neighbors instead of the dictates of a superior.

If men go on a bear hunt and approach the den above the stocade and drive the bear out; then they are to pay damage if the bear attacks people's cattle.

If a man is injured by a dog or horse, or gored by an ox, or bitten by any other farm animal...the owner shall bind it and hand it over to him that was bitten.

If a man shoots at a whale and hits it, and drives the whale ashore; then he who shot owns one half and the owner of the land the other.

If people row a fully-manned boat against a farmer and use force and break into his buildings and carry off the chattels: then they that do this are outlaws.⁴

Even the church law might be given a democratic twist by the 'lagting' in the southeast, where German missionaries had been at work, who were less hierarchically-minded than the English. If the priest wished to be absent from his parish, he is instructed to obtain leave from his parishioners on the preceding Sunday.

In the main, however, the growth and consequently the control of the Church comes from above. In Norway the old gods died hard. Heathen gravemounds on old farms were sometimes the object of a traditional cult until almost with- in living memory, and the folklore of later generations teams

with the adventures of heathen deities. The courage of the Christ who chose to ascend the cross made an immediate appeal to the hearts of the Vikings, and St. Olaf's church law was able to demand one or two acts of mercy - for instance, that in future unwanted infants, unless seriously deformed, were no longer to be killed by exposure. But the Church of Norway grew up, less through spiritual causes than through an increasing realization that it was necessary to belong to Christendom in order to belong to civilization. St. Olaf's successor's on the throne put themselves at the head of this movement.

One of the ways in which Norway followed the English rather than the Continental practice was in the use made in church services of the vernacular. But Latin nevertheless provided the basis of any Catholic liturgy, and for the use of either language by the Church it was necessary to train a priesthood that could read and preferably also write. An English monk who visited the Norwegian court about the year 1070 was taken by the king as 'his master in learning psalmody', for which he had particular heed as he was accustomed to assist the priest at the altar', Olaf the Peaceful, as this king was called, was the first of his line who could read and write, from which fact it is easy to infer the uphill struggle to train a native priesthood, which moreover could only be raised from among the peasants. For heathendom had had no priestly class in Norway,

as each chieftain celebrated the rites on behalf of his own people. What heathendom had left behind, however, was an elaborate gradation of temples, serving respectively the large districts, subdistricts, and the private properties of great men. To replace all these by churches was in the first instance impossible, even if there had been the priests available to serve them.

To begin with, therefore, the Church was essentially a missionary Church, with English, and to a smaller extent German, missionaries as its leaders, working under the direct patronage of kings like Harold Hardrada. When the German archbishop of Bremen, acting under the authority of both the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor, tried to exercise his power of the Norwegian Church, king Harald answered him, 'I know of no archbishop or ruler in Norway except myself alone'. The bishops were still at that time primarily court officials, whose missions the king directly controlled. No church building can be definitely traced which is earlier than 1050 and very few from any part of the 11th century. But the following century saw the growth in Norway of parish churches, some of them squat stone buildings in which the English influence can be clearly discerned, others the wooden 'stavkirker' with their dragonhead ornamentation, steep roofs, and short walls, so reminiscent of a Viking

ship keel. These were, of course, manned by native clergy. The Monastic orders did not become prominent until a rather later period, but by 1120 Cluniac monks had settled on a little island off Trondheim, and three Benedictine houses were also in existence.

The location of the four first regular bishoprics at Trondheim, Bergen, Oslo, and Stavanger marks both the end of the pioneer stage of the church history and the advance of another civilizing influence in Norway. A bishops see attracted population, not merely for the building and service of the cathedral, but for the handicrafts and trade which might hope to flourish on the rents received from the surrounding countryside, rents chiefly paid to the bishop in kind.

The banners of the Norsemen went farther even than the outermost islands. In 1107, when the kingdom had passed under the joint rule of the sons of Magnus III, Europe saw the novel sight of a Viking king, Sigurd I, fighting as a crusader. It is difficult to trace any direct results of Norway's participation in the greatest movement of the age, except indeed that the king fulfilled a vow taken in the Holy Land to introduce tithes. But the episode is a dramatic illustration of the fact that the kingdom of Norway stood now on a level with other champions of Christendom, as a 'people called the Norsemen, whom God had stirred up to journey from the western ocean to Jerusalem.' ⁵

In 1152 a cardinal legate, Nicholas Breakspear, visited Norway. He was the only Englishman to ascend the papal throne and the man who brought England's daughter church of the North into direct allegiance to that throne. Nicholas consecrated at Trondheim a metropolitan to take charge of eleven sees. Five of these were in Norway; the other stretched from far-off Garde in Greenland, through Iceland, the Faeroes, and Orkneys, to the eleventh see of Sodor and Man. The Norwegian ecclesiastical empire was a source of pride and might be made a source of power. But the main point of the action which the cardinal had been sent from Rome to take was, of course, to bring about a closer relationship between the whole of this remote area and the Pope.

Nicholas seems to have been successful in claiming that churchmen should be tried by church courts. Another change which required the approval of the 'ting' was the concession of the right to free bequest of a tenth of inheritance real estate and a quarter of other property. The Church, which taught people to will their land for the benefit of their souls, would be the chief gainer by the change. The papal tax, which was called 'Peter's coin', was also introduced at this time. But it is significant that no attempt was made to introduce the celibacy of clergy.

The opportunity for a further advance of the Church power in Norway came very quickly. The slumbering quarrels of the kings revived. Through a series of battles all three kings were killed, and a young son, Magnus V, claimed through his mother, the throne. Negotiations were therefore opened with the archbishop of Trondheim to strengthen his position by having him crowned the Lord's anointed - a practice well established in other countries but without foundation in Norwegian custom. Archbishop Eystein (Augustine) who came from one of the chieftain families of Trondelag, had newly returned with high ambitions from receiving the pallium at Rome. He had already doubled the income of his see by inducing the 'ting' to agree that all payments due to him must be made, not in debased current coins, but in terms of pure silver. He had in view the completion of a great cathedral, which should fittingly express the wealth and power, the beauty and unearthly aspirations of his religion, high above all kings.

As Trondheim Cathedral still existed chiefly in the mind of the archbishop, it was at Bergen that Magnus was duly crowned in the summer of 1163. He was the first king to rule Norway 'by the grace of God', and the charge involved other charges, both symbolic and practical. The king undertook to hold his kingdom in name as the property

of St. Olaf, in token of which the crown was to be placed at the end of each reign upon the high altar at Trondheim for each new king to receive it anew as from the saint. The 'realm of St. Olaf' was a concept which clearly helped to ward off ideas of Danish overlordship and to emphasize indivisibility; but at the time it also served the Church's purpose by suggesting that the king was a vassal of a saint, whose interest in the affairs of this world was represented above all by the Church. On the other hand, the realm was to pass in accordance with a definite law of succession. To ward off the evil, so often experienced, of the rule of joint kings, the priority was agreed of the eldest lawful son, unless debarred by incapacity of character or intellect. Failing such an heir, the choice from among other sons, other heirs, or in the last resort - other candidates for the throne was to be made by the archbishop, bishops, and twelve leading men nominated by the bishops in each diocese.

What did all this mean in the life of the ordinary man? There was perhaps a hope of an end to the dynastic quarrels when Magnus at the age of 21 successfully disposed of his rival in a battle near Tonsberg. But public opinion was probably more closely concerned with the effect on landed property. A marked feature of the age had been the increase

in the proportion of peasants who were mere tenants. As population grew, farms became smaller or were located on inferior land, so that payments of a fine or tithe or emergency meant recourse to borrowing from the wealthy, who from what we should call mortgages quickly became full owners of the farm. It looked as though the only struggle to be continued any longer would be one which was remote from questions of ecclesiastical power or other matter of principle, actuated merely by the discontent of landless peasants, and rapidly forgotten by history. But then came king Sverre.

This remarkable and enigmatic figure makes his first definite appearance in 1177, as a leader who rallies a band of refugees retreating from Tonsberg into Sweden. Their claimant to the throne having been killed in the battle, they accepted Sverre. He was brought up in the Faeroes, where he was educated for the priesthood, moving from there at the age of 23, when his mother had revealed that he was the bastard son of a king. For a quarter of a century he exercised more than royal influence of Norway's fortunes.

Sverre's social program had been anything more radical than 'Spoils to the Victors'. His offer to his men in battle was: 'He who proves that he has cut down a lord, shall be a lord, and he who kills a royal retainer, a royal retainer shall he be; everyone shall be such a man as he contrives to make room for.' 6

As Sverre was fighting to dispossess the king whom Eystein had crowned, his opposition was inevitable, and he was forced to spend three years in exile in England. He then made his peace with Sverre and devoted the remaining years, until his death in 1188, to ^{the} building of the gothic cathedral at Trondheim. His successor, however, renewed the most absolute claims of the Church in such matters as the appointment of bishops; refused to crown Sverre king; and rather than accept a verdict by the 'ting', which supported the king's demand for a reduction in the number of his armed retainers, sailed for Denmark, where he was received with open arms. The other bishops, though they consented to the coronation, eventually followed their leader into exile. Pope Innocent III placed Norway under an interdict, and the desposition of its excommunicated king was weekly proclaimed by his own archbishop from the safe refuge of the cathedral in Lund. In reply, Sverre's party issued his famous Speech against the Bishops, written by priests, making its appearance not in Latin of the clergy but in the vernacular of the common people:

Kingship is created by God's command and not after the ordinance of man, and no man obtains kingship except by divine dispensation. A king would not be more powerful or mightier than others if God had not set him higher than others in his service; for in his kingship he serves God, and not himself. Duty binds him to answer to God himself, and to render an account of his protection and care of Holy Church; and duty binds a minister of Holy Church to be obedient

to the king, to afford him hearty worship and a guileless loyalty.⁷

Sverre left his mark in state as well as Church. He did not seriously disturb the class structure of society, which was then growing up in Norway; but he made the kings place in it much more influential than before. His new aristocracy was a court aristocracy, which lent itself to a more centralized form of government. It is impossible to say what features were wholly new in a reign which we see chiefly through the eyes of an Icelandic historian, who began his book in Norway 'when king Sverre sat over him and settled what he should write.'⁸ What is certain is that Sverre prepared the way for the golden age of the medieval Norway.

Throughout the century the wealth of the Church was steadily on the increase. About 1,200 churches existed, served by at least 600 priests, in rural Norway - a larger provision of priests than is made nowadays for six times as many parishioners. The total of church rents, including monastic rents, can be calculated at the equivalent of 150,000 kilograms of butter or at least a million kilograms of meal. In some part of the country, at any rate, one-third of the land was in ecclesiastical possession. In 1277 the archbishop gave up the right to control the choice of king, so long as there was any lawful heir to the throne; and the idea that the realm of St. Olaf was

in some sense held from the Church, symbolized in the obligation to offer the Crown on the altar at Trondheim, was likewise abandoned. In return the Church courts got full powers over the clergy and, in matters of religion, over the laity as well, a source both of revenue and pride; and the king confirmed the right of the bishops to appoint the parish priests and of the episcopal chapters to choose the bishops.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

This was the height of the Church's power, but even more important it sounded the blast of the Sacred Realm of St. Olaf. In the years that followed Norway seem to dwindle and vanish both from history and from the history books, for she remained as it were in the shadow of Denmark until the last stages of the Napoleonic wars. The story of the transition lacks the dignity as well as ecumenical proportions which attract us in the decline and fall of Rome, but it raises on a very small scale some of the same puzzling questions about the underlying causes of such change. The bare outline of the facts which follows represents a subject which has been worked over again and again by the historians of modern Norway, seeking to explain and condone the fortunes of their ancestors, but there seems to be no certainty except that the realm of St. Olaf fell on hard times and the European civilization throughout many generations was the poorer for it.

NORWAY AND THE WORLD

793	First accurately-dated Viking raid, on Lindesfarne
853-871	Conquest of Olaf (the White) in Ireland
874	Settlement of Iceland begun
930	Alting established in Iceland
847-8, 952	Erik Bloodaxe king of York
984	First settlement of Greenland
1,000	Leif Erikson visited 'Vinland'
1,000	Battle of Svolder
1,014	Battle of Clantarf
1,016-1,035	Reign of Canute the Great
1043	Magnus I's victory over the Wends at Lyrskog Heath
1,066	Harald Hardrada killed at Stamford Bridge
1,098-1,103	Magnus III's expedition to Scotland, Wales and Ireland
1,107-1,111	Sigurd I's expedition to the Holy Land
1,180-1,183	Archbishop Eystein in England
1,217	Anglo-Norwegian Commercial Treaty
1,263	Battle of Largs
1,266	Treaty of Perth, ceding the Hebrides and Man to Scotland
1,290	Margaret, the Maid of Norway, died in the Orkney

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF MAIN EVENTS

Events in Norway

880-940	Reign of Harald Fairhair (dates very uncertain)
900	Battle of Hafrsfjord (date very uncertain)
945	Disposition of Erik Bloodaxe
995-1,000	Reign of Olaf I (Tryggveson)
1,015-1,028	Reign of Olaf II (The Saint)
1,030 (July 29)	Olaf's death at Stiklestad
1,066-1,093	Reign of Olaf III (The Peaceful)
1,130-1,240	Period of (intermittent) civil war
1,152	Archbishopric of Trondheim established by Nicholas Breakspear
1,177-1,202	Reign of Sverre
1,184	Sverre's final victory over Magnus V (Erlingsson) at Fimreite
1,217-1,263	Reign of Haakon IV
1,277	Concordat of Tronsberg
1,319	First dynastic union (with Sweden)

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